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Britain says spy suspect took photos

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Associated Press

LONDON — Britain charged yesterday at the spy trial of economics professor Hugh Hambleton that he had confessed he had photographed more than 80 top-secret NATO documents and had given them to Soviet KGB agents.

Prosecutors said Hambleton spied for the Soviets for 30 years and received weekly radio messages from KGB agents in rapid morse code while he worked at NATO's economic directorate in Paris from 1956 to 1961.

Hambleton has pleaded not guilty to the charges.

"It was a very efficient system and he photographed well over 80 top-secret documents," Attorney General Sir Michael Havers said on the second day of the jury trial at London's Old Bailey Central Criminal Court.

The documents carried NATO's "cosmic" classification, meaning that disclosure would result in "exceptionally grave damage" to the 15-nation military partnership between the United States and its allies, Havers said.

After the opening session, the court met in closed session to hear testimony by intelligence experts assessing the damage Hambleton allegedly caused Western defenses.

Hambleton contended that the documents were mainly lower-classified items on economics, oil policies and internal NATO politics, but he reportedly confessed that he might have passed top-secret material classified as "cosmic" as well.

Smuggling alleged

"The films were handed over to agents at brief meetings in different parts of Paris — often on the metro, usually in dark streets," Havers charged.

Havers had told the court on Monday that Hambleton revealed to British Special Branch investigators that he was smuggled to Moscow and personally thanked by KGB director Yuri V. Andropov, who is now leader of the Soviet Communist Party.

The meeting with Andropov occurred over dinner in a Moscow apartment in 1975 and was "quite an honor," Havers quoted Hambleton as saying.

Hambleton, 60, is Canadian by birth and British by descent with dual nationality. He has pleaded not guilty to passing top-secret Western information to Soviet agents between 1956 and 1979. Hambleton is now an economics professor at Laval University in Quebec. The jury trial is expected to last five days.

On Nov. 10, Geoffrey Prime, a former translator at Britain's top-secret Government Communications Headquarters in Cheltenham, was sentenced to a 35-year prison sentence for spying for the Soviets. U.S. officials said it was the biggest penetration of Western intelligence since World War II.

Ruling of suicide

Meanwhile, at Cheltenham, coroner David Falkner ruled that Peter Ernest Brockway, 42, a radio operator at the same center where Prime worked, committed suicide by hanging himself at his home on Nov. 24.

British newspapers had speculated before Monday's inquest that Brockway's death might have been connected with the Prime spy scandal. Brockway's wife, Janet, told Falkner that her husband was suffering from depression, while police stressed that neither Special Branch officers nor any other security service were involved in the investigations.

Hambleton was arrested in London in June when he came here on a British passport, saying he intended to take a sailing course, Havers said.

In Ottawa, Solicitor General Robert Kaplan told questioning legislators in the House of Commons that the Canadian government did not have enough evidence to gain a conviction against Hambleton.